

IRAQ RECONSTRUCTION PUBLIC TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Prior to the conflict, approximately 1.2 million Iraqis subscribed to landline telephone service. Much of Iraq's telecommunication network was centralized in Baghdad, and a large amount of the network's switching component was damaged during the conflict and service was disrupted. In Baghdad, 12 exchange switches (out of 38 total) serving 240,000 out of 540,000 telephone lines are out of service.

As part of USAID's priority to restore critical infrastructure and services, USAID partner Bechtel is working to restore the national fiber telecom network, repair the telephone switching system in Baghdad, and restore international telecommunications capability to Baghdad. The priority for restoring the fiber network is the area between northern Iraq's Dahuk and Umm Qasr in the south. Iraq Telecommunications and Postal Commission (ITPC) staff is repairing fiber breaks and bypass destroyed Baghdad exchanges. Twelve telephone switches in the Baghdad region will be restored and one international satellite gateway system will be installed. Bechtel is relying on ITPC personnel to perform much of the reconstruction activities, which will allow ITPC to bring the 240,000 telephone lines back into operation.

Accomplishments

- Completed a map of Baghdad's telecommunications network, including ITPC repairs.
- Purchased tools, equipment, and parts to help ITPC restore parts of the network.
- Audited 400 km of the fiber optic backbone, confirming that only two of twelve fibers are active.
- Awarded contracts for 12 transportable exchange switches and an international satellite gateway.
 - Switch contract will return Baghdad to the pre-conflict operational level of 540,000 subscriber lines.
 - Baghdad's international satellite gateway has been installed and integrated with telecommunication switch systems. The first test international calls were placed on October 23. The site remains on schedule to be fully completed by November 15.

Next Steps

- Install 12 exchange switches in Baghdad at a rate of one a week starting end of October.
- Assist ITPC in the repair of the two legs of the nation's fiber optic network from north of Mosul, through Baghdad and Nasiriyah to Umm Qasr by November.
 - Repair of the 2,000-km cable will connect 20 cities to Baghdad and benefit 70 percent of Iraq's population.

Issues

- Establishing a revenue stream to maintain telephone system.
- Ensuring security at work sites.